



KEEPING OURSELVES SAFE NEAR DOGS

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Teacher notes

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Introduction

Dogs have lived in the company of humans for many thousands of years. The domestic dog as a species, *Canis familiaris*, evolved from the grey wolf, *Canis lupus*, and, although certain similarities remain in terms of body language and behaviour, the dog we know today is a very different animal compared to its ancestor, the wolf. Recent research shows that dogs are highly adapted to live with us and to communicate with us. They are also highly attuned to taking information from us and respond to our gestures without the need for training. There is also evidence that we as humans benefit from, and are therefore adapted to live with, and need, dogs. Contrary to beliefs in the past, the domestic dog is definitely not simply a tamed wolf.

Current thinking has also dismissed certain past beliefs about wolves and their own social structure and behaviour. Studies of wolves newly released into the wild have shown that, rather than living in a strict hierarchy, wolves live in families of related animals, all with individual relationships with each other, as do we. Free-living wolves are far less aggressive with each other than has been assumed in the past, using instead many communicative gestures and social rituals to avoid at all times the risk of damaging each other. The notion of alpha male and female leaders who dominate and control their pack by aggressive means has therefore been rejected in favour of the idea of experienced parents who guide their family using largely non-aggressive social gestures.

Unfortunately, the concept of dominance and the false belief that this is the way wolves do it, has resulted in many dog training techniques which rely on threat and coercion in order to force dogs to do as we tell them. Although they may appear to work, in that all dogs will try to avoid danger and threat, they also run the significant risk of an aggressive response if a dog perceives the threat is great enough to warrant it. It must be stressed that aggression is not, however, a routine means of communication – it is a last resort if all else fails.

Dogs now come in all shapes and sizes although they have all descended from the wolf. Certain breeds have been selected because they are good at doing certain things, like running fast, retrieving birds, or finding things using their sense of smell. So they are used as guide dogs, sheep dogs, gun dogs, search and rescue dogs, to detect drugs and bombs, as well as simply for companionship. Some dogs have been selected because they look strong and protective. But although it may appear that certain dogs are more 'dangerous' or more likely to bite than others, this is very rarely the case. All dogs may bite if they perceive the need, regardless of their size, shape or how cuddly or strong they look.

If a dog bites a person, it must mean that, at that moment, communication between the two individuals had failed to such a degree that aggression became the only option as far as the dog was concerned. It may well be that the actions of the human were not intended to be threatening and may even have been considered to be friendly in human terms. But what a dog has experienced in the past will have a bearing on how it decides to behave in the future. If it has had an unpleasant experience, then it may become fearful in any similar situation and so behave aggressively. A dog may also be automatically fearful in new situations and behave aggressively 'just in case'. We cannot assume that dogs will like us just because we like them and want to pet or hug them.

To prevent dog bites, it is essential to realise that all dogs want to avoid aggression if at all possible. By seeing things from a dog's point of view and using up-to-date knowledge of the nature of dogs, it is possible for us to give dogs the information they need to feel safe. A dog who feels safe, will not need to bite. But to prevent bites, we need to set aside our needs and put the dog's needs first. This resource will help you do exactly that.

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HOW CAN WE AVOID DOG BITES?

Lesson Objectives:

- to understand why dogs bite
- to realise the importance of human interactions with dogs
- to realise dogs usually become aggressive to defend themselves and their possessions
- to understand that there is a graded ladder, or sequence, of aggression for both dogs and humans
- to realise that certain actions and situations can trigger aggressive behaviour in both dogs and humans
- to understand that dog bites can be avoided
- to stop dogs feeling like biting.



Glossary of terms

The glossary below will explain terms used in this resource.

Domestic dog/canine – a species of animal evolved from the wolf.

Aggression – threatening behaviour that all animals, including humans, may use if they, or things they value, are threatened.

Dog bite – a form of aggression where a dog's teeth make contact with the skin of another.

Growling – a low rumble a dog will make if it feels threatened. It is a warning to stay away.

Commandment – an instruction that someone else, who knows more than you do, thinks is a good idea.

Dangerous – something that might be harmful to us.

Punishment – something unpleasant designed to stop behaviour we don't like.

Reward – something pleasant designed to encourage behaviour we like.

Guilty – knowing you have done something wrong.

Environment – everything and everyone around us, wherever we are.

Polite – behaving in a way which puts other people, and dogs, at ease.

An obedient dog – one who chooses to do what we want them to do when we ask them.

A disobedient or 'naughty' dog – one who chooses to do something other than what we want.

A well-behaved dog – one who chooses to do what we want them to do without being asked.

Barking – a noise dogs make with their mouths open to communicate to others. They have many different barks for different purposes. It is always best to ignore a barking dog.

Ignore – do not approach or pay any attention at all – turn away instead.

Introduction to the teaching sessions

Resources

- Lesson pack of Worksheets 1 – 16
- A1 or A3 sheets of paper
- highlighter pens
- coloured pencils, felt pens, etc.

Worksheets

In order to prevent dogs biting, and to keep ourselves safe at all times, we are going to look at why dogs bite in the first place.

To provide some background to the topic we suggest that teachers ask their pupils to complete a short survey, about dogs, using the questions provided.

Survey

(Worksheet 1)

Teachers can then discuss the pupils' answers to the survey questions and correct misconceptions, when necessary, using the background information in the Introduction.

The material presented below should help answer the following questions and situations.

Are all dogs likely to bite?

(Worksheet 2)

[Which dogs do you think may bite you?]

Can we tell, just by looking, if a dog is likely to bite us in these situations?

(Worksheet 3)

[Look at the photographs and ask which of these dogs is most likely to bite, might possibly bite or is least likely to bite.] (Ensure children understand that any dog could bite depending on the circumstances.)

What things make you frightened and feel threatened?

(Worksheet 4)

[Discuss and compile a list of situations and actions which make us frightened and feel threatened.]

What makes a dog frightened and feel threatened?

(Worksheet 5)

[Compile a list of actions which the children think might make a dog frightened and feel threatened. Are there any similarities between dogs and humans? Discuss.]

What happens when we go from being calm to being angry and behaving aggressively?

How can we recognise when a human is getting frightened and feels threatened?

(Worksheets 6 & 7)

[What changes are important? (see Worksheet 6.) Is it our physical appearance, our speech, our movement, the sound of our voice? Discuss as a class how people change as they go from being calm to being angry. Put them on the human Ladder of Aggression, (see Worksheet 7.)]

How to get along with people

(Worksheet 8)

[Design a poster to make others aware of your 'triggers', i.e. events or situations that might cause you to behave aggressively.]

How can we recognise when a dog is getting frightened and feels threatened?

(Worksheets 9 & 10)

[Discuss the canine Ladder of Aggression, use Worksheet 9]

[For role play, use Worksheet 10]

How to get along with dogs

(Worksheets 11 – 14)

Plenary sessions

(Worksheets 15 – 16)

Answers

- Worksheet 2 Perception of the type of dog and what it is doing in each photograph is likely to colour a child's expectations of 'friendliness' or tolerance. For each photograph, suggest 'what ifs' - What if you were to walk close to the dog in the van or try to pet it? What if the puppy had to be given an injection by a vet? What if you threatened or frightened the German Shepherd? What if you suddenly disturbed the sleeping dog? The message must be that all dogs CAN bite and it is only when you get to know a dog well, that one can judge how tolerant a dog is and therefore how likely it is that they might bite.
- Worksheet 3 A – most likely to bite
B – might possibly bite
C – might possibly bite
D – might possibly bite
E – most likely to bite
F – least likely to bite
- Worksheet 7 See separate answer sheet in teacher notes, human Ladder of Aggression
- Worksheet 9 See separate answer sheet and text in teacher notes, canine Ladder of Aggression
- Worksheet 11 There is no exact or correct order, as all these 'rules' will prevent dog bites, or reduce the likelihood of dogs biting. However, it is probably true to say that G is perhaps the most important.
(See also the Shepherd reference on page 5 of the teacher notes for a further explanation and discussion of these twelve rules.)
- Worksheets 12 If the difference in ranks is large this means that the rankings of the two pupils differ markedly; if the difference in ranks is small this means that the rankings of the two pupils are very similar: [the range in the difference in ranks could be from 0 (identical rankings) to 72 (opposite rankings)]
- Worksheet 13 The behaviour of the dog showing the most suitable form of 'please' (a simple sit) is in the photo on the left, whereas the dog on the right is demanding attention in an inconvenient and potentially dangerous way. Dogs will use any one of a number of behaviours to get what they want - only those we find acceptable must be allowed to work. The 'sit = please' rule is very easy for everyone to remember and ensures that a dog will learn to ask for things in a pleasant and safe way. (See also the photo of Rosie in Appendix 5.)
- Worksheet 14 a – medium threat
b – medium threat - the novice handler was trying to get the dog to drop the toy by saying 'Leave' and pulling it away - he was also being shouted at by the instructor
c – high threat (the dog is eating a bone)
d – high threat
e – low threat
- Worksheet 15 Q 1. Yes - Dogs are frequently upset by noises which may seem normal to people, for example, rain and thunderstorms. If shut indoors during a storm, a dog may be destructive or urinate in their distress. They may even be wrongly punished for being 'naughty' when their owner gets home.
Q 2. Yes - All of us need to remember and learn from past events in order to be able to get along with each other and avoid danger. Recent research, particularly in the Universities of Lincoln, UK, and Budapest, Hungary, is confirming how well dogs are able to monitor and learn from their experiences in very subtle ways. This research has also shown how attentive dogs are to human beings, in comparison to their ancestor, the wolf. (See Miklosi, reference page 5)
Q 3. Yes...as long as we are speaking the same language
- Worksheet 16 Actions by humans that might cause a dog to be aggressive include:
petting a dog whilst it is eating
taking something away from a dog
striking/hitting a dog
cuddling/hugging a dog when it is sleeping

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References

Shepherd, K. 2007. *The Canine Commandments*. Bristol, Broadcast Books. [Copies are now only available from the author - her e-mail address is kendal@lindenarts.co.uk]

Miklosi, A. 2008. *Dog behaviour, evolution and cognition*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Bradshaw, J. 2011. *In Defence of Dogs - why they need our understanding*. London, Allen Lane (Penguin Books).

Teachers may find these websites helpful

www.ukandspain.com/dangerous-dogs/

The website has some very graphic images of dog bites to children. Teachers may wish to see these images to understand how shocking dog bites can be, though ASAB would not advocate showing the site to children.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7264620.stm>

The site has a report from a BBC Health reporter focusing on an injury to a 9 year old child, 'Chloe'. It has a single photo of her face showing the scratches she received and one of her face after her treatment. ASAB believe this material would be acceptable for teachers to use in the classroom, if they judged this to be suitable, as the child is in the relevant age range for this resource.

N.B. This is an example of an apparent dog attack on a child that resulted in injury but was NOT A BITE. Nevertheless, the skin tear needed sutures in an A & E department.

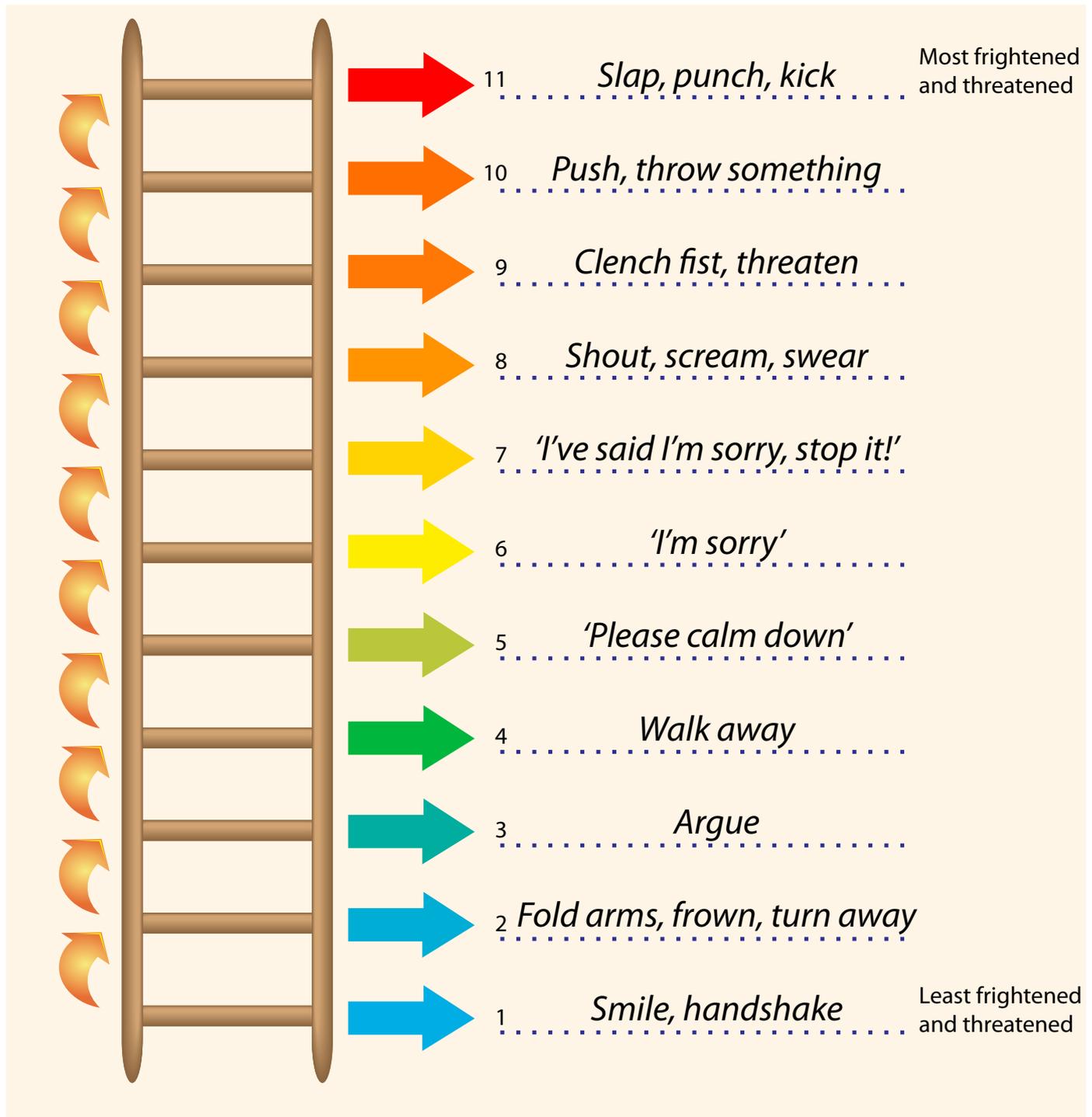
www.dogwelfarecampaign.org

This website goes into some detail about the connection between the misunderstanding of the nature of dogs, training methods, and potential aggression.

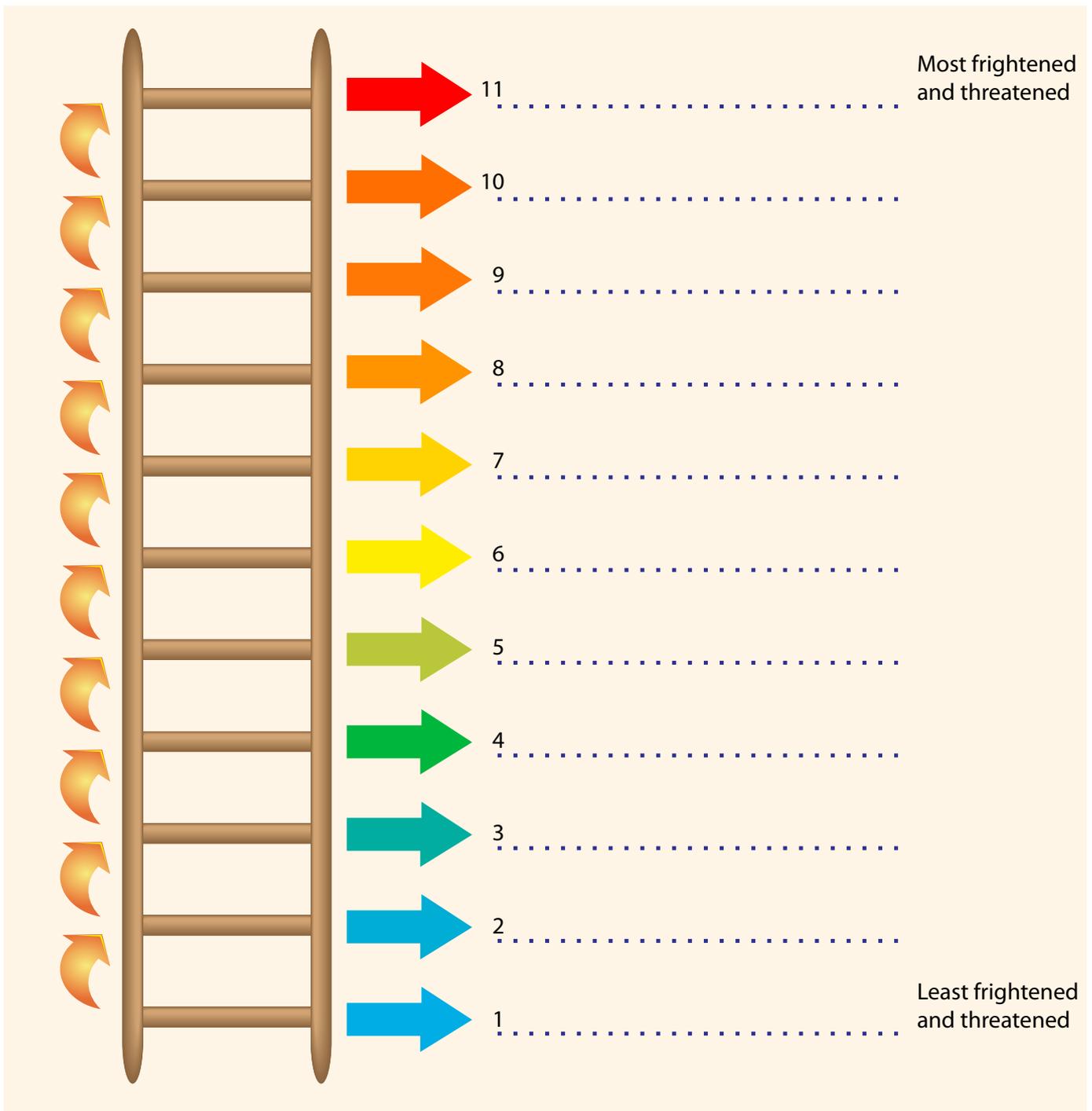


The human 'Ladder of Aggression'

How we can recognise when a human is getting frightened and feels threatened

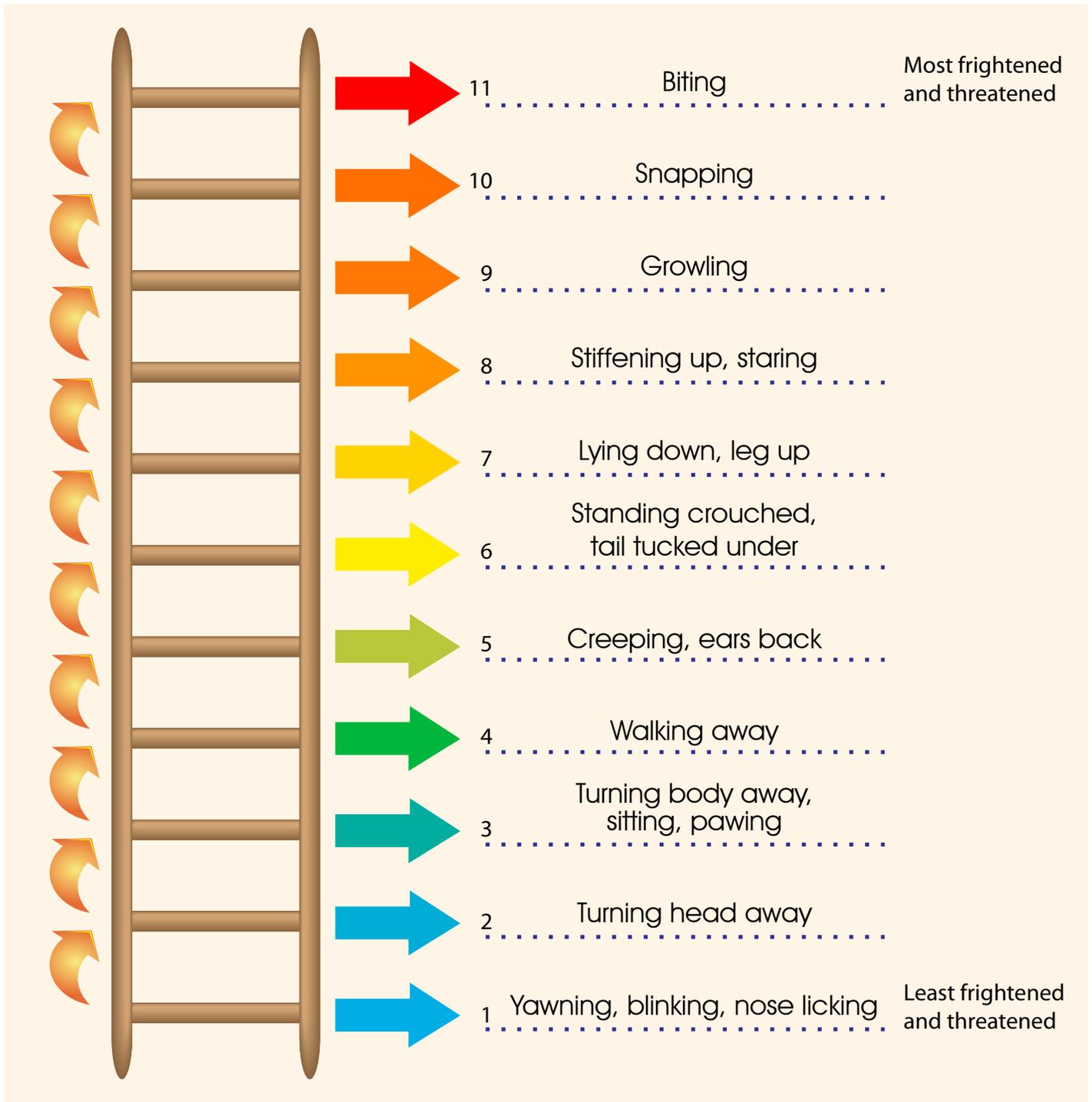


The human 'Ladder of Aggression'



The canine 'Ladder of Aggression'

How we can recognise when a dog is getting frightened and feels threatened



For illustrations of the body postures listed above see the Canine Commandments book by Kendal Shepherd, page 5.

The canine Ladder of Aggression

Because they cannot speak, dogs do many things with their bodies to communicate to companions how they feel and what they want. The main purpose of all the gestures dogs use is to keep the peace. They do not want to have to fight with others any more than you do. Just as we will try to calm someone down who is upset or angry using words, dogs will use their bodies. If a dog raises his paw, puts his ears back or walks away from you when you are upset or angry with him, he is trying to calm you down. Even if you are angry or arguing with someone else, he may do exactly the same thing as he is now trying to calm you both down. Dogs very often seem to us to look as if they know they have done something wrong when we are angry with them. But they do not have the ability to feel guilty as we do. They are instead simply asking us to calm down and stop threatening them. If you continue to be angry with a dog despite his calming attempts, he may begin to feel like biting you to make you stop. Whereas you will use words in anger, a dog will use his teeth.

The Ladder of Aggression is an illustration of many of these gestures. They are used when dogs are in the company of either people or other dogs and they are all designed to try to reduce stress and avert danger, in effect to say, 'Please stay calm!' or even, 'Go away and leave me alone!' The lower rungs on this ladder are the equivalent of polite social gestures that humans use, such as smiling, saying hello and shaking hands. These are things we do to let other people know we want to be friendly towards them and mean them no harm. We expect similar gestures in return so that we can all remain at ease with people, whether we know them well or not. It is just the same for dogs.

If our smile or handshake were to be met with disapproval or anger, it would without doubt start to make us feel upset and rather less like being friendly. Exactly the same is true for dogs. If lower rungs of the ladder do not seem to work, dogs are forced further up towards the top and to have to growl and bite. Unfortunately, by misunderstanding what a dog is trying to say with his body, we often accidentally make them feel much less friendly towards us. Getting angry with a dog for walking away from us rather than coming to us, or because he looks guilty about something he has done, will make a dog more likely to move up the ladder. He may even learn to

go straight to the top of the ladder immediately just to be on the safe side. Remember above all that a dog who looks 'guilty' or 'sorry', is only asking you to calm down - not admitting that he has been naughty! The more angry we are however, and the more a dog tries to calm us down, the more guilty-looking he will seem to become. If we carry on being angry instead of calming down immediately, dogs will learn that the only behaviour which gets people to leave them alone is to bite.

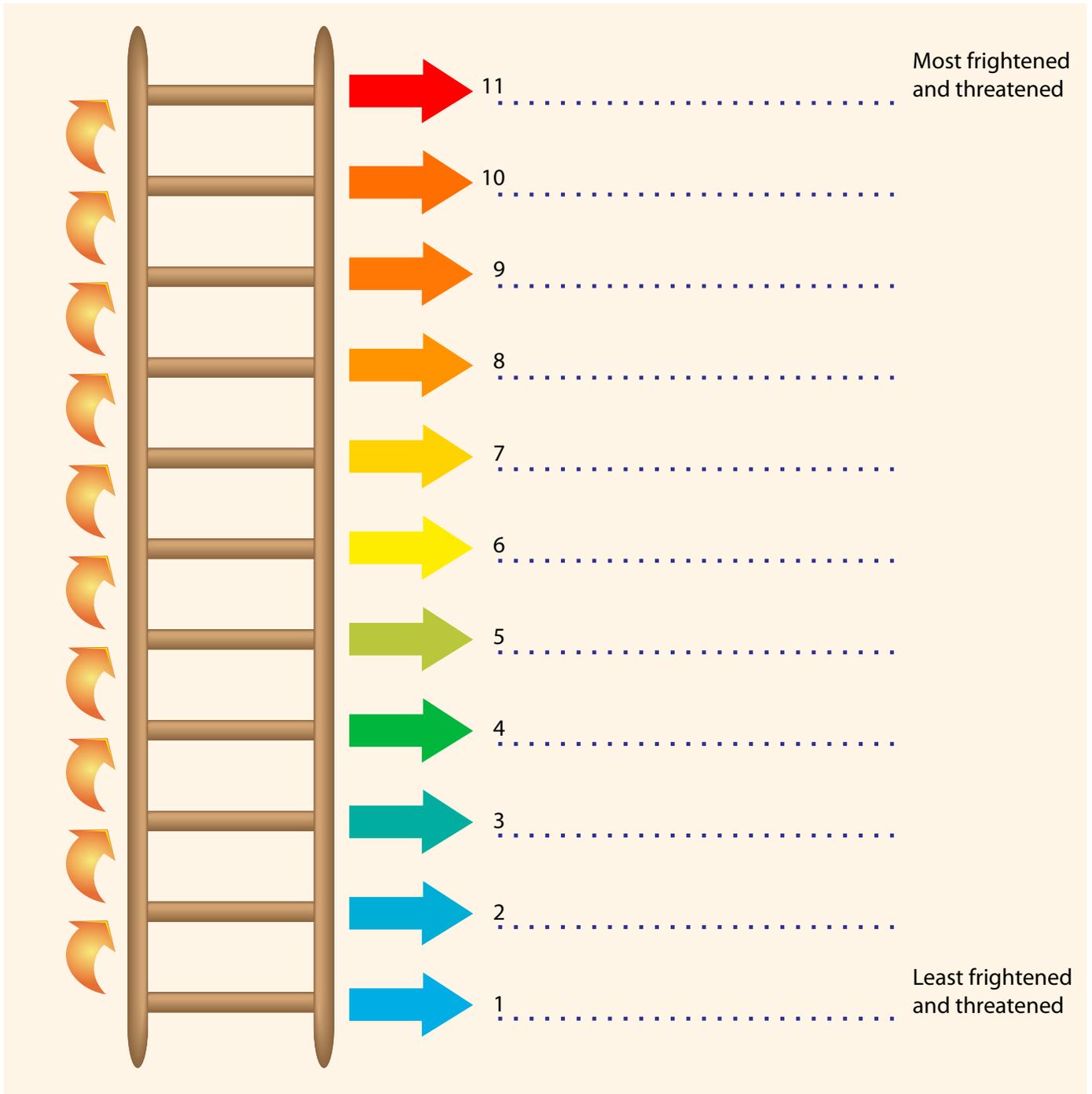
The most useful way to make sure a dog is unlikely to bite you is to ask him or her to come to you, wherever he is and whether or not he has something in his mouth. If he runs happily towards you, he is saying that he feels safe in your company. If, however, he stays lying down, stands still or walks or runs away from you, he is trying to say the opposite - 'You are threatening me - please stay away!' If you follow him or try to touch him, you will show him that you do not understand his language and make him more likely to have to growl or bite.

None of us would enjoy being misunderstood or being unable to understand what people around us are saying. But this is how many of our dogs feel a lot of the time. Learning to understand what a dog is really trying to say and encouraging him to understand what you mean, but without getting angry, will make both of you very much happier.

Happy dogs have no need to bite.

(Excerpt from The Canine Commandments by Kendal Shepherd).

The canine 'Ladder of Aggression'



Appendix 3 – for Worksheet 12, if needed

Name

Date

How to get along with dogs

Put the rules in order from 1 to 12, rank 1 being the most important, then rank 2, etc..

Rules	My order	Friend's order	Difference
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			
I			
J			
K			
L			
			Total =

Discuss with your partner why you have chosen a different order.

What does it mean if the total of the difference in the ranks between you and your friend is:

a) large?

b) small?

General advice and guidance for Year 5 and Year 6 children regarding dogs and the potential danger of dogs biting children.

Let sleeping dogs lie!

Below are some guidelines for children if they see a dog – adhering to the guidelines should reduce the chances of a dog being fearful and therefore aggressive.

DO NOT disturb a dog that is sleeping, drinking, eating or looking after its puppies.

DO NOT approach or tease a dog in a garden or one that is behind a fence/gate/barrier or one that is tied on a lead/chain.

DO NOT approach or pet a dog you are unfamiliar with.

DO NOT run towards or close by a dog, for example, whilst out jogging or playing.

NEVER, EVER intervene in a dog fight, even if it is your own dog, as you will very likely get bitten, possibly seriously.

IF YOU COME ACROSS AN INJURED DOG leave it alone, but do tell an adult.

Additional advice based on Kendal Shepherd's experience in behavioural counselling and a number of legal cases.

The situations below may provoke aggression by dogs.

If your dog is approached and handled by someone they do not want to touch them – e.g. a vet or a groomer.

If you reprimand your dog, for example, by getting angry, pointing at them, pulling them by their collar or smacking them.

If you try to take back a toy or a stolen item.

If your dog is chased by a human.

If your dog is frightened – for example, by loud noises (e.g. around 5 November) or shouting.

If you have an argument or fight with someone else, such as a family member, friend or stranger, when your dog is with you.

If you let your dog get close to other people if they are having an argument or fight.

If you let your dog get close to people who are drunk or on drugs.

If you allow your dog to be suddenly approached by someone in uniform, for example, a policeman.

CONSIDER THE DOG'S VIEW AT ALL TIMES

A real example from Kendal Shepherd relating to young children interacting with a dog.

What to do in this situation?

Here is an example of a real life situation involving children and a dog. It could easily arise in many public places and teachers may like to discuss this with their classes.

The owner, the vet KS, had tethered her dog, Rosie, to her car and was standing beside the car when the incident happened, see Figure 1.

Figure 1 Rosie and the two young children



Two small children approach the dog with crisp packets in hand. Rosie automatically sits as she thinks food is in the offing and sitting is her signal for 'please' (from her past experience) to encourage the children to give her a crisp. Throughout this incident the vet was carefully supervising her dog.

What does the vet advise in this situation?

- a) Should any owner tether a dog in a public place if unsupervised? **NO!**
- b) Should the parents of the young children have let them approach the dog without asking the owner? **Absolutely NOT!!!**
- c) Did the vet let them pet Rosie? **NO.**

(The vet absolutely believed that Rosie would not have bitten the children as she was close by her dog throughout. However, nobody could be absolutely sure. The vet then took a crisp out of the packet and gave it to Rosie while she was sitting. This was to reinforce to the dog that young children continue to mean good news (i.e. food) and that sitting is an appropriate behaviour in their presence.)